

Cuba Sub Base Data Called Dubious

By TAD SZULC

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WASHINGTON — American officials said yesterday the United States had only dubious and dated information to indicate that the Soviet Union might be planning to build a strategic submarine base in Cuba.

For this reason, these officials, who include members of the intelligence community, said they were at a loss to explain why the White House chose last week to warn Moscow against the establishment of such a base.

Officials and diplomats have suggested the possibility that the White House acted for broader policy motivations, including the Middle East crisis, or that an alleged Soviet threat in Cuba was being used to signal dangers that might develop if Dr. Salvador Allende, a Marxist, becomes Chile's president in November as expected.

THE QUESTION of the reported Soviet plans for a naval base is delicate because officials in the administration are inhibited from commenting on background briefings by the White House.

The practice of background briefings, by officials who cannot be publicly identified, often has turned into a source of embarrassment to the State Department.

While Latin American diplomats wondered why the U.S. chose to create at this time what appeared to be an artificial crisis in the Caribbean, American officials acknowledged that the unconfirmed reports of construction of a Soviet base in the Cuban port of Cienfuegos had been available since early this year.

THE OFFICIALS said that little, if any, new information had been obtained in recent months that would account for the warning that the Soviet Union can be under no doubt that we would view the establishment of a strategic base in the Caribbean with the utmost seriousness.

It was recalled that virtually all the information on the reported Cuban base had been presented to the House subcommittee on inter-American affairs during hearings between July 8 and Aug. 3.

The possibility that the Soviet Union might seek to build a base was raised in the closed-door hearings by Adm. E. P. Holmes, commander in chief of the Atlantic Fleet, and by G. Warren Nutter, assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs.

NUTTER'S REMARK that the establishment of a Soviet base "cannot be discounted as

long as Castro's hostility to the United States persists" was partly deleted from the transcript for security reasons. But no witness reported actual evidence of base construction.

Officials said there still was no evidence of suspicious construction activities, despite

flights by U-2 surveillance planes.